

Deadline failed

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isolated from people and wants to continue in power through repression and atrocities", the former prime minister said, pointing to the mass arrests ahead of her party's deadline. The government would not do this if it enjoyed confidence of people, she thought.

Responding to a question on credibility crisis of the AL as its deadline flopped, Hasina said, "Of course not. I don't think so. Giving ultimatum is nothing unusual in politics."

Brushing aside reports of probable frustration among her party leaders and workers in the wake of failure of the deadline, she said, "Our party men as well as people are not frustrated. In future, people will come forward with us more vigorously."

Without elaborating she however said a certain quarter might be frustrated as they were waiting to be beneficiaries of the fall of the government by April 30.

About government allegation of a conspiracy behind the April 30 deadline, the AL chief said, "We believe in healthy politics, not in conspiracy. So, we did not create disorder despite instigation from the government."

At least 20,000 people including opposition workers, innocent men and women, students, businessmen and employees were arrested in the run-up to the AL deadline.

Asked about non-governmental organisation (NGO) Proshika's links to the AL ultimatum to unseat the government, Hasina replied, "Have you ever heard that any NGO has toppled a government?"

About AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil's declaration to use the trump card to bring down the government, she said, "If he (Jalil) has the card, it will be shown in time." When the general secretary of a party says something, the party chief has to be aware of it, she added.

On the government move for 14th amendment to the constitution, Hasina said, "They (government) are extending retirement age of the chief justice to get a man of their choice as chief of the caretaker government."

Reacting to BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan's call to the AL leadership to apologise

Outlaw lynched

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incident.

In another incident, eyes of another PBCP armed cadre, Bellal Hossain, 29, of Ramnagar under the upazila, were gouged out reportedly by angry villagers at midnight on Thursday.

He is now undergoing treatment at Khulna Medical College Hospital.

Sonia

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more than the 140 seats held now.

The Hindu newspaper said the exit polls had shown Gandhi's Italian birth was not an issue with most voters despite attempts by the BJP to whip up emotions.

Gandhi, who took Indian citizenship after her marriage into the celebrated Nehru-Gandhi family, says she does not care about the BJP attacks.

The BJP-led coalition has said it would introduce legislation barring anyone born overseas from holding high public office if it wins, a move critics say primarily targets Gandhi.

Under the constitution, any Indian citizen can run for the top office.

May Day today

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special programmes while national dailies are bringing out special supplements on this occasion.

President Prof Iajuddin Ahmed, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and Opposition Leader in Parliament Sheikh Hasina gave separate messages on the eve of the historic day.

They paid rich tributes to the memories of the May Day martyrs and urged the people to observe the day showing proper respect to their struggles and noble sacrifice to realise workers' rights.

The Labour and Employment Ministry will take out a procession at 9:30am from Shrama Bhavan, which led by State Minister Aman Ullah Aman will parade to Osmani Memorial Auditorium via the Zero Point. A discussion meeting will then be held there at noon with the prime minister as the chief guest.

In a joint May-Day statement, Communist Party of Bangladesh President Monjurul Ahsan Khan and General Secretary (GS) Mujahidul Islam Selim said the working-class in Bangladesh were leading an inhuman life due to closure of factories one after another, retrenchment of one and tortures on workers and non-payment of the minimum wages.

Bikalpa Dhara of Prof Badruddoza Chowdhury will organise a May Day discussion and a rally at 11am at Segun Bagicha in the city.

Swadhin Bangla Garments Sramik-Karmachari Federation will hold a meeting in front of the Engineers Institution at 9:30am and then take out a procession from there to Muktagang.

Jatiya Sramik League, the workers front of the major opposition Awami League, has undertaken a daylong programme to mark the

to the nation regarding the deadline, Hasina said, "Why should we apologise? They (government) have to seek pardon from people very soon due to their mass killings, repression, corruption and other crimes."

Hasina said she is scheduled to visit US on May 6 to see her daughter and son.

Party leaders present at the press conference included Abdus Samad Azad, Zillur Rahman, Abdul Jalil, Amir Hossain Amu, Tofail Ahmed, Suranjit Sengupta, Sajeda Chowdhury, Motia Chowdhury, Sheikh Selim, Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, Abdus Shaheed, Saber Hossain Chowdhury, Asaduzzaman Noor, and Mostafa Jalal Mohiuddin.

Simi's threaten

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the eve teasing, at the spot.

However, local Ward Commissioner Mamunur Rahman came to the scene and requested the police to release the arrestees, saying he would talk with the witnesses of the suicidal case of Simi and resolve the antagonism.

The commissioner said if Khail and Jalil were proved to be guilty of the attack, they would be punished.

But, family sources said, later, the house was once again bombarded with bricks.

Replying to a question on the objective of his intervention to release the accused, Commissioner Mamunur said, in line with his duty as a people's representative, he promised the family to settle the dispute locally. But, Simi's mother Jarina Begum said they did not agree to nor had confidence in the commissioner's initiative, he alleged.

The officer-in-charge (OC) of Khilgaon Police Station told The Daily Star yesterday that the dispute over the incident was amicably settled Thursday night, in presence of Haji Yunus Ali Mircha, a local BNP leader.

The OC also said police had been posted since then near Simi's house to thwart any such further attack.

Abductors

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10:00pm Monday.

The gang demanded a ransom of Tk 2 lakh for his release and threatened his family members to kill him if the demand is not met within 24 hours.

Police sent the body to Kushtia General Hospital for autopsy.

Police stations

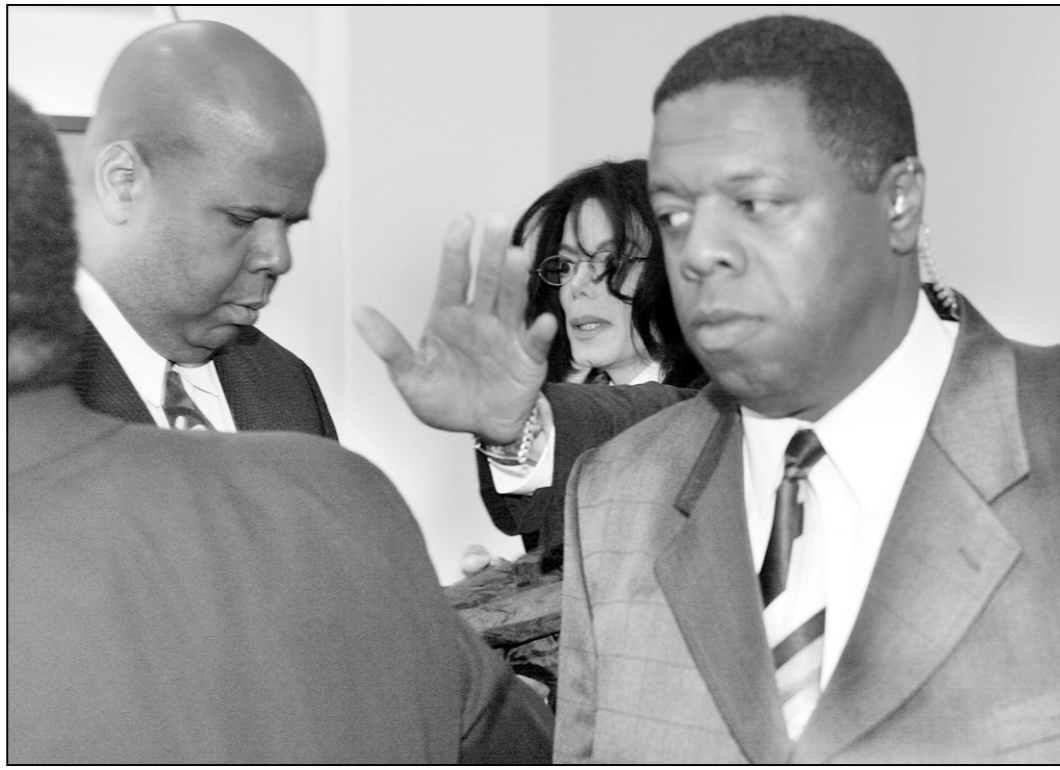
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struggle for "emancipation of the oppressed masses".

The PBCP has widely circulated such leaflets in the southwestern region blaming police and journalists alike for supporting brutalities against PBCP activists, some of whom were lynched while others had their eyes gouged out by angry locals.

Police and government intelligence agencies have come under fire for failing to check activities of the outlaws who are now openly active in Khulna city.

Akbar Ali, deputy commissioner (south) of Khulna Metropolitan Police, expressed his firm determination to crush the PBCP with active co-operation of the people.

He denied allegations of police brutality against PBCP cadres, adding it was the public who either lynched or mutilated some of the extremists in recent months.



Pop idol Michael Jackson hides behind his body guards as he enters the courthouse in Santa Maria, California, yesterday. Jackson is under investigation on child molestation charges.

Jackson pleads not guilty

AFP, Santa Maria, California

Singer Michael Jackson pleaded not guilty yesterday to a 10 count grand jury indictment on child molestation charges including a new accusation of conspiracy to abduct a child.

The new count alleged 28 "overt acts" pointing to a conspiracy involving child abduction, false imprisonment and extortion by the 45-year-old singer.

There were four counts of lewd acts upon a child and one of an attempted lewd act on a child and four of administering alcohol to facilitate the acts.

A plea of "not guilty to all charges" was entered by his new lawyer Thomas Mesereau.

Judge Rodney Melville then turned to Jackson to ask if he agreed and the pop star nodded his head.

A three million dollar bail order remains in force, the judge said.

The hearing continued to decide future arrangements.

Maoists free 41 policemen in Nepal

AFP, Kathmandu

Maoist rebels battling to overthrow Nepal's monarchy have freed more than 40 policemen seized three weeks ago in a remote eastern district of the Himalayan country, a government official said on Friday.

"The 41 policemen were handed over to the International Red Cross Society representative in the presence of human rights workers and journalists," a home ministry official said.

They were released in a brief ceremony in the Sankhuwasabha district in the far northeast of Nepal, the official said.

Bhuiyan

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The leaders and activists of the party are now totally demoralised. "I don't think the AL leaders and workers even believed Jalil when he said he could bring the government down by April 30."

Answering to a question on the credibility of the evidence gathered from Proshika when two high officials of the NGO appealed to retract their confessions, Mannan said, "Criminals always say they are not guilty as soon as they are out of the police station."

The government will take necessary legal actions after investigation into Proshika's political agenda.

BNP Joint Secretary General Tarique Rahman and leaders Abdullah Al Noman, Mirza Abbas and Nazrul Islam Khan were present, among others.

Jalil draws

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On the failure to dislodge the government by the deadline, Obaidul Kader said the meeting observed that people lost confidence in the government. "People showed by responding to the deadline that they don't trust the government."

"The government now thinks of people as its opponents. The ruling coalition tries to cling to power through repression and torture. The arrest of innocent people shows the coalition's desperation to stay in power."

"I fought for our country to recover everything it lost under communism and the Soviets... and now my struggle is over. My ship has come to port."

On a mountain-top on the borders of Austria, Italy and Slovenia, top officials gathered Friday in a ceremony to mark the enlargement.

"Life has offered me the chance to stand for the first and the last time on a border that tomorrow will be no more," Slovenia's Prime Minister Anton Rop said at the ceremony taking place at the three-border area at the top of a 1,509-metre (4,980 feet) high mountain.

"We are writing new rules for Europe as free and equal nations that are heirs to wars, conquests

Polls show rejection of Gaza pullout plan

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel's Prime Minister Ariel Sharon had a mere 48 hours yesterday to convince 193,000 fellow Likud party members to support his unilateral pullout from the Gaza Strip, as polls showed they will most likely reject the plan in a Sunday referendum.

A headline in the center-left daily Haaretz read "PM launched last-ditch bid to win vote" as it referred to a late Thursday meeting of Sharon and close aides during which he underlined his intention to win the referendum.

The paper said that, in a televised interview to be broadcast Friday night, Sharon will say it will be difficult to run the country if he is disavowed by his party.

"It is meant as a warning, if not an outright threat, to Likud members that his defeat would endanger the party's hold on government," wrote Haaretz, brushing off Sharon's intent to resign.

Sharon has so far said the referendum would not be politically binding.

Four polls published Friday unequivocally gave the plan's opponents a projected victory on Sunday.

A Haaretz poll showed 43 percent of the respondents oppose the plan, with 36 percent approving it and the remainder having no firm opinion.

A poll in the mass-circulation Maariv gave 45 percent of members against the plan, 42 percent for it and 13 percent undecided.

Israeli's top selling Yediot Aharonot's poll showed 47 percent of the 193,000 Likud members hostile to their party leader's plan, 40.5 percent in favor of it and 12.5 without a clear opinion.

Paradoxically, national opinion polls have steadily shown that a majority of Israelis are in favor of the plan.

Yediot journalist Nehama Duek pointed out that despite Likud's apparent intention not to support the evacuation plan, the premier's

popularity continued to be high among Likud members and the Israeli public at large.

That might indicate that the final results could still be in his favor.

The Friday Yediot poll also sounded out party members for their opinion of Sharon as a prime minister rather than party leader, showing that 83 percent believe he is good or even very good.

The paper said that among the general public, the prime minister's performance is deemed satisfactory by 63 percent.

Under tight security, the 193,000 Likud members will be asked to vote for or against Sharon's plan to unilaterally disengage from the Palestinians whom the hawkish premier claims are incapable of working towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

The move, slated for completion by the end of 2005, will see the dismantlement of 21 Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip and four others in the West Bank.

In turn, Sharon suggested Jewish presence would be reinforced in existing West Bank settlements.

The plan has received US President George W. Bush's thumbs up.

Meanwhile, in the southern Gaza Strip, Israeli military sources said 20 soldiers were lightly wounded by shrapnel after Palestinians fired a rocket propelled grenade near the Jewish settlement of Neve Dekalim.

Palestinian security sources said Israeli armor and two bulldozers rolled into the nearby Palestinian city of Khan Yunis early Friday and razed five houses and partially destroyed six others.

In the West Bank, four wanted militants were nabbed by troops, military sources said, adding the both that territory and the Gaza Strip continued to be under full army control.

The hermetic blockade was reimposed after Israel killed Hamas spiritual leader Sheikh Yassin in March 22 Gaza air strike.

European Union

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World War II.

The Czech Republic is one of the 10 nations joining the Union. The others are Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.

Czech Prime Minister Vladimir Spidla told AFP while walking in the EU fair that "joining the EU marks the end of a long and difficult journey."

"I, like most Czechs, am looking forward to joining the EU most of all because of the freedom it will bring us," he said.

In Poland, former president and Solidarity trade union leader Lech Walesa described his country's entry into the EU as a dream come true.

"On May 1, my lifelong dream will come true," Walesa was quoted as saying in Friday's edition of the daily Zycie Warszawy. "I have always been committed to accomplishing the will of the previous generation."

"I fought for our country to recover everything it lost under communism and the Soviets... and now my struggle is over. My ship has come to port."

Tiny Malta plans to hold the biggest firework display of all the EU newcomers.

Lithuania has called on its citizens to light candles outside on Friday night in order to make it the most glowing of the new EU states, with a US National Center of Geophysics satellite standing by to photograph the event from space.

In Poland, President Aleksander Kwasniewski will raise the EU flag at midnight Friday in Warsaw, while ambassadors in Slovakia representing all 25 EU states will celebrate EU unity in Bratislava.

Fresh US warning of possible terror attacks

REUTERS, Washington

The US State Department on Thursday reissued its "worldwide caution" to remind US citizens of the chance of attacks by al Qaeda or other militant groups around the world.

A State Department official said the warning, whose wording was nearly identical to one issued by the department on March 23, was being released to remind people the threat level remained elevated but did not reflect major new information.

"The Department of State remains concerned by indications that al Qaeda continues to prepare to strike US interests abroad," the department said in language identical to its last "worldwide caution" issued five weeks ago.

"Al Qaeda and its associated organisations have most recently struck in the Middle East and in Europe but other geographic locations could also be venues for attacks," it added, again tracking the previous announcement.

The latest statement was issued nearly five months before the previous warning had been to expire on Sept 23.

"There is a lot of troubling activity. The threat level remains elevated. We are concerned about the continuing and ongoing possibility for actions against American targets," said the State Department official who asked not to be identified.

"Given that general environment, we thought it was appropriate to do this at this time," he added.

The official also noted the main change in the new version was to remove references in the last warning to Israel's killing of Hamas leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin and the possibility that might spark attacks on Americans.

"The idea was to make it as timeless as possible so that we don't have to keep putting these out every time (something happens)," he said.

The department also issued a new version of its warning to US citizens about the danger of "terrorist" attacks in the Middle East and North Africa that closely followed the previous one on March 23 but also dropped references to Yassin's killing.

BNP lawmaker

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(Bangladesh Nationalist Party), and his supporters stormed the local Rural Development Board office where voting for election to the executive body of Rickshaw Sramik Samabaya Samity was in progress at around noon yesterday.

Sources said the ruling party men ousted all election agents and workers of Chandu Mia, the AL-supported president candidate, from the centre, and arranged for false voting in favour of Mokhesur Rahman, the BNP-supported presidential candidate.

Shortly afterwards, ASM Firoz, former lawmaker and Baufal upazila AL president, rushed to the polling centre to protest illegal interference by the armed BNP men.

The ruling party cadres subsequently attacked Firoz and chased him away from the area.

The BNP lawmaker denied having been involved in the attack on Firoz and also rejected the allegation of interference in the election, saying he went to the polling centre only to ensure a peaceful, impartial and free election.

Chandu Mia, the AL-supported candidate, alleged that the BNP lawmaker did his best to manipulate the election in favour of the ruling party candidate. Chandu Mia also faxed a message to that effect to Patuakhali district administration.

The vote count was going on at the time of filing this report. The BNP candidate was in the lead.

Red tape

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reportedly on the suggestion of certain firms and contracts for supply of the books were awarded to them.

The project was stalled following a Daily Star report on the faulty selection of books.

As the education ministry took a fresh initiative to change the list of books, one firm took the issue to court.

Barind

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For Rafiq, the success of deep tubewells in his fields assured him of a new future. "This is my family's land and I am a farmer, so my choice has always been to plough these fields. Now I can pass this piece of 2.5 bighas to my son and be assured he will be successful."

These days, Rafiq sells 20 maund of rice for each of the three varieties that he grows from three seasons, alongside the Amon of monsoon. He also cultivates Iri and Tiamon. An economic success came with the greening lands and the vast empty areas are being repopulated with a huge influx of people coming in from neighbouring districts.

Like his fellow farmers from nearby fields, Rafiq regularly consults with the Barind project officials to ensure efficiency by regulating the price paid for water and providing feedback on weather-land conditions and services.

The community of farmers has taken up the transition from desolation to happiness. They have moved from towns to fields, concentrating on their crops.

Bill in US Senate renewing sanctions against Myanmar

AFP, Washington

A resolution renewing import sanctions against Myanmar was introduced Thursday in the US Senate with a warning that the controls may not be removed even if the country's opposition leader is freed.

Senator Mitch McConnell, one of the bill's 16 sponsors, suggested that the sanctions remain in place until Myanmar's military rulers embarked "on an irreversible path towards reconciliation and democracy."

Apparently referring to the junta's recent decision to free several opposition figures and allow them to meet, McConnell said the junta was "window dressing" ahead of a convention it planned to hold on May 17 which he called a "charade."

The junta is keen for as many political parties and ethnic groups as possible to attend the convention to draft a new constitution, which is the first step in its so-called "roadmap to democracy."

A previous convention collapsed in 1995 when the opposition walked out.

McConnell said even if Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar's opposition leader, were released before that date, "it is not sufficient."

This is because "there are no guarantees for her security, no assurances that she will be able to freely express her views to the nation or to meet with ethnic leaders, and no sure bet that the junta will grant visas to journalists to travel to Burma," McConnell said, using Myanmar's old name.

The resolution was to renew sanctions imposed last year after Aung San Suu Kyi's detention following an ambush on her National League for Democracy (NLD) supporters by a junta-backed mob.

In a statement, the United States Campaign for Burma group, which is pushing for freedom in that

country, called for swift passage of the sanctions, which include bans on imports and financial services.

"These sanctions will deny my country's military regime part of the hard currency it needs to stay in power," said U Mya Win, an official of the group and an elected NLD member of parliament forced to flee Myanmar after serving nearly 10 years behind bars as a political prisoner.

In a surprise move this week, leaders of the NLD were allowed to meet Aung San Suu Kyi and several NLD leaders were freed.

NLD secretary U Lwin said Thursday that relations with the government had improved and that the party would continue to push for Aung San Suu Kyi's release.

But McConnell said the senators learned from credible sources Wednesday that 11 NLD supporters arrested in the wake of last year's premeditated attack were sentenced by the junta from seven to 22 years in prison. This was in addition to the death sentence given to a Myanmar sports writer who had complained about soccer related corruption and to three other men for having contact with the International Labor Organisation, a UN agency.

Two US legislators last week alleged that the Myanmar government used rape as a weapon of war, citing a new report by a Thailand-based Burmese ethnic-minority group, the Karen Women's Organization.

The report documented more than 100 recent rapes by the regime's soldiers.

US President George W Bush discussed the situation in Myanmar with Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra in a telephone conversation Tuesday.

Myanmar had abruptly cancelled plans to attend international talks on prospects for reform due in Bangkok this month, forcing their postponement.

Saddam general

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Some 200 foreign Islamic militants have also been active, US commanders and Iraqi officials in Baghdad say.

US Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz spoke of trying to "isolate the killers from the population."

Further details of the accord remained elusive. US demands that Marines launch joint patrols with Iraqi police inside town appeared to have been dropped. There was no word on a call to local people to hand over the killers of four US contractors whose bodies were publicly mutilated, prompting the US siege.

People who had fled homes in Falluja lined up at military checkpoints to return to the town, clearly hopeful that a peaceful resolution might now be in sight.

President George W Bush gave his troops a free hand this week to retake control of the city, a symbol of insurgency among Iraq's Sunni Muslim minority against the American occupation, and the Pentagon has sent dozens more heavy tanks to the area.

A US defence official said efforts to win over hearts and minds before handing over formal sovereignty to an interim Iraqi government on June 30 had to be balanced with a need to show that resistance to US occupation would not be tolerated.

"The Iraqis do respect strength. In their mind, a lot of that strength comes from combat power presence," he said.

Around the southern holy city of Najaf, US forces are tightening a squeeze on the Mehdi Army militia loyal to rebel cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, who has taken refuge among shrines sacred to Iraq's long oppressed Shi'ite Muslim majority.

In Falluja, doctors say about 600 Iraqis have been killed.

April has also been the bloodiest month for American forces in 13 months in Iraq. Ten deaths on Thursday meant nearly a quarter of the 534 US combat deaths have occurred this month.

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rights one does not hesitate to violate human rights of many others in Bangladesh," said Attorney General AF Hassan Arif.

"There are formal and non-formal perpetrators violating human rights at national and international levels."

On the United States' reservation in ratification of the ICC Statute, Arif said it was a challenge not only to Bangladesh but also to the entire international community.

He said Bangladesh, yet to ratify the Statute, should raise any hindrances to it in UN debates.

"We also need to change our mindset, resolve our internal discords keeping present day world context in mind."

A total of 139 states have so far signed the Statute while 93 have ratified it. The Statute came into force on July 1, 2002 after 60th ratification.